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The President's Daily Brief

February 16, 1976

2

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Exempt from general
declassification schedule of E.O. 11652
exemption category 58(1)(2)(3)
declassified only on approval of
the Director of Central Intelligence

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Table of Contents

Nigeria: General Obasanjo, the country's new head of state, promised yesterday to continue the policies of his predecessor. (Page 1)

Note: Morocco - Algeria - Spanish Sahara (Page 2)

At Annex we examine the Lebanese political settlement announced on Saturday.

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

NIGERIA

General Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's new head of state, promised yesterday to continue the policies of his predecessor Murtala Muhammed who was assassinated during an abortive coup on Friday. Reportedly named head of state by unanimous vote of the ruling Supreme Military Council, Obasanjo was the number two man and armed forces chief of staff in the previous hierarchy.

Nigeria's new leader was among those who helped to shape Lagos' position favoring the popular Movement in Angola and who tried to develop a Nigerian image of more decisive leadership in Africa. He is strongly anti-South African and can be counted on to continue a hard line on South African issues.

Last month, Obasanjo seemed to suggest to a foreign policy seminar for senior officers that the regime should consider the use of oil as a political and economic lever. He stated that "sooner or later" Nigeria "might have to take into account the tremendous importance of oil" in pursuit of the country's national interests.

Aged 38 and born a Catholic in western Nigeria, Obasanjo is a member of the Yoruba tribe, one of the country's three major tribal groups. The regime's present leadership continues to preserve a good balance among Nigeria's competing tribal and regional interests. Obasanjo himself has a reputation for a non-tribal approach in decision making.

In the wake of the attempted coup, Lagos and the rest of the country are reported to be generally quiet. Borders and airports are closed, and a curfew is in effect. Support for the plotters apparently was limited to a few rebel units in Lagos and in two of Nigeria's 19 states; one military governor was also assassinated. The coup leader still has not been apprehended.

Rumors are circulating in Lagos and elsewhere alleging US complicity in the plot arising from US-Nigerian differences over Angola. University students demonstrated briefly yesterday against the US consulate in Ibadan, a town in western Nigeria.

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NOTE

Moroccan King Hassan yesterday challenged Algerian President Boumediene either to accept an internationally guaranteed peace or openly declare war, according to a Moroccan radio broadcast.

King Hassan accused Boumediene of breaking promises not to use Algerian troops in the Sahara. Hassan stated that "Algerian troops" had attacked Moroccan forces Saturday at the Amgala oasis where clashes occurred in late January between Moroccan forces and Algerian troops supporting Polisario Front guerrillas.

Algeria responded today with a statement implying that Polisario guerrillas had carried out the attack. A Polisario spokesman claimed last week that guerrillas had reoccupied the oasis.

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LEBANON

The political reforms announced by President Franjiah on Saturday meet most of the demands of Lebanon's old-line Muslim leaders, yet they preserve the most important prerogatives of the country's Christian minority. Although the reforms do not include the fundamental political changes sought by the radical leftists and some Muslim religious leaders, they may lead to greater leftist representation in parliament, and they promise a variety of social and economic reforms.

If these reforms are implemented soon, Lebanon may win a period of peace that could last several months or even a few years. If the Christian leaders attempt to delay implementation of the reforms, however, or to introduce qualifications, the fighting probably will begin again. Renewed fighting might prompt Syria and the main Palestinian fedayeen groups to withdraw their support from the present political compromise.

The Reforms

In outlining the reform package, Franjiah sought to balance concessions for the Muslims with reassurances for the Christians. He promised the Muslims that Lebanon's constitution will continue to "evolve by experience" to accommodate needed changes in the political system, that the government is committed to social justice, and that the country will never abandon its "Arab character." At the same time, he assured the Christians that the 1943 National Covenant will be preserved, that the Palestinians will be expected to adhere to their past agreements with the Lebanese government, and that Lebanon will retain its "sovereignty."

As outlined by Franjiah, the most important points of the reform package provide for:

--Continuation of the present distribution of top political posts: the president will be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament a Shia Muslim.

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A1

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--Equal Christian and Muslim representation in parliament and revision of the electoral law to provide for proportional representation of sects within each major religion and for unspecified "better representation" of the population.

--Election of the prime minister by parliament instead of his selection by the president.

--Changes in parliamentary voting procedures requiring a 55-percent majority for the election of the president and a two-thirds majority for unspecified "issues of destiny."

--Transfer of some power from the president to the prime minister.

--Decentralization and a merit system in the civil service.

--Drafting of a new defense policy and strengthening of the army.

--Establishment of a special body to plan economic development and a commitment to "universal social justice" through economic and social reform.

The president did not say when these reforms are to be implemented, nor did he confirm press reports that Prime Minister Karami's cabinet will be expanded to oversee implementation of the accord.

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[redacted] a new cabinet will be formed soon, and [redacted] all parties to the political settlement agree that some action toward implementing each reform will be taken within a month after a more representative government is installed.

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Party and Factional Positions

The old-line Muslim leaders are likely to conclude that the increased representation they have won in parliament is insignificant. Their major gain is in the increased power of the Muslim prime minister relative to that of the Christian president.

Prime Minister Karami, a Sunni Muslim and a strong prime minister, gains most from the new agreement. In the future, the strong control he already exercises over parliament probably will be threatened

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A2

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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slightly less by the Christians and only a little more by radical Muslims or leftists. In addition he can claim that he has won the bulk of the reforms he has been seeking since his appointment last July. These include equal Christian and Muslim representation in parliament and the civil service, "reinterpretation" rather than amendment of the national covenant, and a variety of economic and social reforms.

Although the leftists received no satisfaction of their fundamental demands, they are not likely to try to start new hostilities until they see whether the government implements the promised economic and social reforms. Some of the leftists will be satisfied with limited reforms; others will be forced into inaction by the military presence in Lebanon of the Syrian-controlled Palestine Liberation Army and by the decision of the major fedayeen groups to cooperate with the Liberation Army in enforcing the cease-fire.

The only leftist who has promoted a coherent set of political reforms over the past several months has been Socialist leader Kamal Jumblatt. His party platform calls for extensive education and social welfare programs, a merit system in the civil service, proportional representation in parliament, an independent judiciary, electoral reform, and some reduction in the powers of the president.

Although Jumblatt probably will complain that the promised reforms do not fully meet his demands, he may conclude--if the reforms are actually implemented--that he has won as much as he could reasonably expect. If his party--which has the largest leftist militia--is satisfied and counsels respect for the cease-fire, the other leftists almost certainly will find themselves forced to observe it as well.

Leaders of the large Christian political parties presumably decided to accept the reform package because it perpetuates Christian control of the presidency and--theoretically, at least--leaves in force the 30-year-old national covenant. In addition, the Christians, even before endorsing the final version of the package, received Syria's reaffirmation of its guarantee that the Palestinians would respect past agreements limiting fedayeen activities in Lebanon.

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A3

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A policy statement issued by the right-wing Phalanges Party last August had indicated that the group would approve political concessions if the national covenant were retained, if the Palestinians honored their commitments to the Lebanese government, and if security were restored in Lebanon.

The army is now partially disarmed and wholly demoralized and is unlikely to play an effective role in internal security for several months. Peace in Lebanon will depend on the continued willingness of Syria and the large Palestinian groups to control the Lebanese and fedayeen radicals and on the willingness of the leaders of Lebanon's private militias to cooperate in implementing the current political agreement.

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